

Cultural Awareness: Lessons Learned and A Way Forward



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Bottom Line:

- Afghanistan and Iraq highlighted massive gaps in our cultural awareness and cultural training procedures
- Despite top-down and bottom-up initiatives, cultural awareness training is still ad hoc, stove piped, and often inadequate or off target
- The *US Government* must pull together a comprehensive cultural training doctrine

Background: Cultural Lessons Learned

- Marine intelligence experience in Iraq and Afghanistan
- Gaping hole of cultural awareness discovered
 - Culture is an intel job... check in the box
 - No starting point – don't know what we don't know
 - No data – old ethnographic studies not enough
 - Cultural terrain just as important as geo terrain
- Cultural Awareness Working Group formed
 - 50 + members: DoD, USG, academic, international
 - Working to develop joint, cohesive ideas and doctrine

Culture and the Intelligence Community

Working Group Assessment:

- Cultural awareness and training deficient across the board:
 - No clear understanding as to why culture was important
 - Basic cultural information out of date or non-existent
 - Language not fully linked to culture, vice versa
 - “Five year old soccer match” – everyone follows the ball
 - Culture wasn’t sexy, didn’t target any HVTs
- Cultural initiatives are stove-piped, non-doctrinal, dissociated
- No central resource for unclassified basic information
- Fickle working relationships with academic community

What's being done... and needs to be done

Actions in Progress:

- Marine Corps CAOCL (Brief by LtCol Scott)
- ABCA Cultural Awareness standards and TTPs authorized
- MCIA developing more in-depth, broader cultural studies
- MCIA Tribal Study developed, being modeled by J-3
- Army developing comprehensive program
- Contractors developing training tools, support concepts
- Intel community identified gaps and way forward

Actions Without Much Action:

- Updated joint cultural awareness and intelligence doctrine
- Formal “connect the dots” between stove-piped groups